

Chapter 5

Case Study:

The Relationship Between Curriculum Focus on Inquiry and Self-Directed Learning

ABSTRACT

Chapter 5 presents a case study that reports on the assessment of self-directed learning (SDL) in three schools categorized with the local curriculum framework, and three nearby schools with the International Baccalaureate's Primary Years Programme. Results of the investigation indicate that there is a link between curriculum and students' knowledge of, as well as their response to, instruction about SDL. The chapter ends with a discussion of the implications of curriculum emphasis on inquiry for students' SDL, and the opportunities that exist for using the assessment of SDL with local curriculum documents that aim to promote effective learning in primary schools.

INTRODUCTION

This investigation of the relationship of school curriculum support for inquiry to students' knowledge of SDL and its development following explicit scaffolding seeks to clarify whether schools with explicit support for inquiry support development of SDL knowledge more than schools with less explicit support for inquiry. In a curriculum context with explicit support for inquiry teachers are likely to place a strong emphasis on involving students in inquiry

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which would foster the development of SDL skills. On the other hand, schools without the same explicit support for inquiry could be engaging students in inquiry activities but this could be ad hoc, and on an individual class basis rather than as part of the context of the school. In schools without explicit curriculum support for inquiry, students are less likely to be engaged in carrying out inquiry as a regular part of the curriculum. In this case, these schools may not be actively fostering the development of SDL in their students.

Curriculum designers, and those who implement it, have been urged to conduct self-assessment in which they ask how well the curriculum being implemented supports students' learning (Armstrong, 1992). This case study takes up this challenge by examining how well the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum and local curriculum framework support the development of students' knowledge of SDL.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CURRICULUM FOCUS ON INQUIRY AND SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Inquiry is an important way to learn because it is through this process that students actively build understanding based on their experiences and the learning context (Schoenfeld, 1989). In addition, carrying out inquiry involves students in making meaning by interpreting and relating new knowledge to their prior knowledge (Resnick & Klopfer, 1989; Bruning, Schraw & Norby, 2011).

In South Australia, there has been an increasing number of government and independent primary (elementary) schools that have adopted the International Baccalaureate (IB) program that is based on constructivist views of learning and has an inquiry approach to much of the curriculum. At the same time, the constructivist-based local (and more recently the national) curriculum framework is being implemented in South Australian primary schools. The *IB Primary Years Programme (IBPYP)* (2010) has an explicit focus on inquiry, while the local and national curriculum's focus on inquiry is less explicit. This could mean that schools with the IBPYP curriculum would be providing strong support for development of inquiry and students' knowledge about SDL. On the other hand, schools with the local curriculum framework may be providing less support for teachers to develop inquiry and students' knowledge of SDL, due to less explicit acknowledgment that students need guidance and instruction to do these things. Paying attention to the development of

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